Kalam

ʿIlm al-Kalām (Arabic: عِلْم الكَلام, literally "science of discourse"),[1] usually foreshortened to **Kalām** and sometimes called "Islamic scholastic theology",[2] is the study of Islamic doctrine (*'aqa'id*).[2] It was born out of the need to establish and defend the tenets of Islamic faith against doubters and detractors.[3] A scholar of Kalām is referred to as a *mutakallim* (plural: *mutakallimūn*), and it is a role distinguished from those of Islamic philosophers, jurists, and scientists.[4]

The Arabic term *Kalām* means "speech, word, utterance" among other things, and its use regarding Islamic theology is derived from the expression "Word of God" (*Kalām Allāh*) found in the Qur'an.[5]

Murtada Mutahhari describes Kalām as a discipline devoted to discuss "the fundamental Islamic beliefs and doctrines which are necessary for a Muslim to believe in. It explains them, argues about them, and defends them"[2] (see also Five Pillars of Islam). There are many possible interpretations as to why this discipline was originally called so; one is that the widest controversy in this discipline has been about whether the "Word of God", as revealed in the Qur'an, can be considered part of God's essence and therefore not created, or whether it was made into words in the normal sense of speech, and is therefore created.

Contents

Origins

As early as in the times of the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE), the discipline of Kalam arose in an "attempt to grapple" with several "complex problems" early in the history of Islam, according to historian Majid Fakhry. One was how to rebut arguments "leveled at Islam by pagans, Christians and Jews". Another was how to deal with (what some saw as the conflict between) the predestination of sinners to hell on the one hand and "divine justice" on the other, (some asserting that to be punished for what is beyond someone's control is unjust). Also Kalam sought to make "a systematic attempt to bring the conflict in data of revelation (in the Qur'an and the Traditions) into some internal harmony".[6]

Historian Daniel W. Brown describes *Ahl al-Kalam* as one three main groups in the time around the second century of Islam (*Ahl ar-Ra'y* and *Ahl al-Hadith* being the other two) clashing in polemical disputes over sources of authority in Islamic law. *Ahl al-Kalam* agreed with *Ahl al-Hadith* that the example of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was authoritative, but it rejected the authority of ahadith on the grounds that its corpus was "fill with contradictory, blasphemous, and absurd" reports, and that in

jurisprudence, even the smallest doubt about a source was too much. Thus, they believed, the true legacy of the prophet was to be found elsewhere. *Ahl al-Hadith* prevailed over the *Ahl al-Kalam* and most of what is known about their arguments comes from the writings of their opponents, such as Imam al-Shafi'i.[7]

As an Islamic discipline

Even though seeking knowledge in Islam is considered a religious obligation, the study of kalam is considered by Muslim scholars to fall beyond the category of necessity and is usually the preserve of qualified scholars, eliciting limited interest from the masses or common people.[8]

The early Muslim scholar al-Shafi‘i held that there should be a certain number of men trained in kalam to defend and purify the faith, but that it would be a great evil if their arguments should become known to the mass of the people.[9]

Similarly, the Islamic scholar al-Ghazali held the view that the science of kalam is not a personal duty on Muslims but a collective duty. Like al-Shafi‘i, he discouraged the masses from studying it.[8]

The Hanbali Sufi, Khwaja Abdullah Ansari wrote a treatise entitled *Dhamm al-Kalam* where he criticized the use of kalam.[10]

The contemporary Islamic scholar Nuh Ha Mim Keller holds the view that the criticism of kalam from scholars was specific to the Muʿtazila, going on to claim that other historical Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazali and an-Nawawi saw both good and bad in kalam and cautioned from the speculative excess of unorthodox groups such as the Muʿtazila and the Jahmis.[11] As Nuh Ha Mim Keller states in his article "Kalam and Islam":

> What has been forgotten today however by critics who would use the words of earlier Imams to condemn all kalam, is that these criticisms were directed against its having become "speculative theology" at the hands of latter-day authors. Whoever believes they were directed against the `aqida or "personal theology" of basic tenets of faith, or the "discursive theology" of rational kalam arguments against heresy is someone who either does not understand the critics or else is quoting them disingenuously.[11]

Major kalam schools

Sunni

Orthodox

- Maturidi
- Ashʿari

Unorthodox

- Muʿtazili

Shia

- Imāmī Shiʿa
  - Twelver *(Theology of Twelvers)*
  - Ismāʿīlī

- Nizari
- Musta'li
- Hafizi
- Tayyibi

Hadith rejection

- Quranism

See also

- Arianism
- Jahm bin Safwan
- Jewish Kalam
- Kalam cosmological argument
- Logic in Islamic philosophy
- Logos (Christianity)
- Madhab
- Qadr (doctrine)

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11. "Nuh Ha Mim Keller - Kalam and Islam" (https://www.scribd.com/doc/2471775/Nuh-Ha-Mim-Keller-Kalam-and-Islam).

Further reading

Eissa, Mohamed. *The Jurist and the Theologian: Speculative Theology in Shāfiʿī Legal Theory* (https://www.gorgiaspress.com/theology-and-legal-theory-in-the-fifthelevenths-century). Gorgias Press: Piscataway, NJ, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4632-0618-5.

External links

- Kalam and Islam by Sheikh Nuh Keller (http://masud.co.uk/kalam-and-islam/)
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn, *The Philosophy of the Kalam,* Harvard University Press, 1976, 779 pages, ISBN 978-0-674-66580-4, Google Books (https://books.google.com/books?id=fuv8J-g7EdAC), text at archive.org (https://archive.org/details/ThePhilosophyOfKalam)
- Living Islam (http://www.livingislam.org/k/ki_e.html)

Encyclopedia Judaica: Cosmology

Jewish Concepts: Table of Contents | Heart | Sin

Cosmological theories describe the physical structure of the universe. For cosmology in the Bible, see *Creation .

In the Talmud

According to R. Simeon b. Yoḥai, the earth and the heavens are like "a pot with a cover." This "cover" is the *raki'a*, the firmament. "The darkness of the firmament is that of a journey of 50 years. While the sun in the sky passes this journey of 50 years, a man can walk four miles." The distance between the firmament and the earth is the equivalent of a journey of 500 years (TJ, Ber. 1:1, 2c). The firmament is composed of water and the stars of fire, but they dwell harmoniously together (TJ, RH 2:5,58a). The heavens (*shamayim*) are an admixture of fire and water (*esh* and *mayim*) or made wholly of water (*Sham mayim*; Ḥag. 12a). Indeed, "the Holy One, blessed be He, took all the waters of the sea and with half He made the firmament and the other half the ocean. The firmament is like a pool, and above it is an arch" (Gen. R. 4:4 and 5). The earth is of the same thickness as the firmament (Gen. R. 4:5). Once every 1,656 years the firmament shakes on its foundations (Gen. R. 38:6).

There is however more than one firmament; according to R. Judah, there are two, according to Resh Lakish, seven (Ḥag. 12b). The sun and the moon are situated in the second firmament (Gen. R. 6:6). The above-quoted view of R. Simeon b. Yoḥai would imply that the world is wholly enclosed by the firmament. R. Joshua was also originally of the same opinion, that the world was "like a tent" enclosed on all sides, but later he came round to the view of R. Eliezer that it is like an *exedra*, closed on three sides only, but open on the north side, and it is from this opening that the north wind comes (BB 25b).

Originally the sun and the moon were both of the same size but God, realizing that "two kings cannot wear one crown," diminished the size of the moon. Thus what were originally "the two great luminaries" became "the greater luminary" and "the lesser luminary" of Genesis 1:16 (Ḥul. 60b). Eclipses of the sun are a sign of God's anger or displeasure (Suk. 29a). Beneath the earth is the abyss (*tehom*). There is a cavity which descends from the Holy of Holies to the abyss.

[Louis Isaac Rabinowitz]

In Medieval Jewish Philosophy

In medieval philosophy there were four types of cosmological theories: the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic, the neoplatonic, the Kalām theory, and the theory of the infinite universe.

ARISTOTELIAN-PTOLEMAIC

The medieval version of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology asserts that the universe is a finite sphere whose center is the earth, around which nine other concentric spheres – the moon, the sun, the various planets, the stars, and the diurnal sphere – rotate. These spheres form a compact whole in which there are no gaps, or an inner vacuum, and around which there is nothing. The earth and the heavenly spheres differ in their composition. The latter are made up of a single element, ether, whose homogenous nature is free from change other than locomotion. The earth is composed of four elements, earth, water, air, and fire, whose continual transmutations make terrestrial substances subject to generation and corruption. Each of these moving spheres has a "soul," or internal moving force, which is set in motion by corresponding incorporeal substances, the Separate Intelligences. (According to some, "soul" and "intellect" are different aspects of the incorporeal substance.) According to *Maimonides , these incorporeal substances are identical with the angels (Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:6). The ultimate source of motion is God, the Prime Mover, who "moves" the universe insofar as He is the most perfect substance, and therefore the object of love of all other substances (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 7:7; Maimonides, *Guide* 1:72; 2:1).

NEOPLATONIC

Medieval neoplatonic cosmology employs several Aristotelian notions but tries to overcome the terrestrial-celestial dichotomy inherent in the Aristotelian theory. Indeed, in some neoplatonic philosophies there is a decidedly pantheistic or monistic tendency (cf. the Christian philosopher Scotus Erigena). Solomon Ibn *Gabirol is the most neoplatonic of the medieval Jewish philosophers. In attempting to demonstrate the essential unity of the universe he applied the Aristotelian form-matter framework to every part of the universe except God and the Divine Will. The result of this extension is that every level of being that emanates from God (see *Emanation) exhibits a common universal matter and universal form. Each level of being, however, is further characterized by a specific material nature and a particular formal structure. In this way both homogeneity and diversity are accounted for. Typical of monistic cosmologies, Gabirol's system tends to be static: the emanation of the lower stages of being from God is described in non-temporal terms. The origin of the universe, as well as motion, is explained by Ibn Gabirol as the effect of God's will, which seems to serve as the mediating link between God and the universe.

KALĀM

The *Kalām cosmology employs the model of a universe consisting of atoms in a vacuum. These indivisible particles combine, separate, and recombine, forming the universe by these movements. The Kalām version of atomism differs from its Greek antecedents in that it rejects any notion of an infinite magnitude (Maimonides, *Guide*, 1:73). Atomism had virtually no impact upon the mainstream of Jewish philosophy, although a number of Karaite philosophers accepted its doctrines (see *Atomism). Abu al-Barākāt *Ḥibat Allah of Baghdad was a profound atomist but he had no influence upon Jewish thought, probably because of his

conversion to Islam in his late years. Indeed, the most important Jewish representative of the Kalām, *Saadiah Gaon , was not an atomist.

INFINITE UNIVERSE – CRESCAS

One aspect of classical atomism, however, is found in the cosmology of Ḥasdai *Crescas . His philosophy constitutes a vigorous critique of Aristotle's physics and cosmology. Crescas reverts to the atomistic hypothesis of an infinite vacuum in which our universe, and perhaps others, are located. (The possibility of a plurality of universes is also found in rabbinic literature, but is rejected by Maimonides and other medieval Aristotelians; cf. Gen. R. 3; Maimonides, *Guide*, 2:30). Although Crescas does not explicitly introduce atoms into his physics, his theory of matter exhibits atomistic aspects. For example, unlike Aristotle, Crescas sees matter as requiring no external principle for its motion: bodies have a natural tendency to move. Consequently, Crescas eliminates the artificial system of intelligences as causes of motion. Finally, he rules out the distinction between the composition of the earth and the heavens in favor of the notion of a common matter characteristic of all bodies celestial and terrestrial. In several important respects Crescas' cosmology anticipates some ideas of Galileo and Newton.

[Seymour Feldman]

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